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NSC BRIEFING

11 JANUARY 1956

FRENCH ELECTION RESULTS

I. In metropolitan France, Communists got 5,426,803 votes on 2 Jan-- 415,552 more than '51 elections.

A. This was 25.0% of total vote. However, because '55 elections brought more voters to polls, percentage of popular vote won by Commies was 0.9% less than '51.

B. Vote won Commies 145 metropolitan seats. Also got at least 5 from overseas, for seat increase of 53 over 1951 strength.

II. Broader application proportional representation responsible for increase in Communist representation:

A. 1951 law, designed to favor center parties at expense extremists, permitted "affiliation" of party lists--giving all seats in election district to coalition winning majority of popular vote.

1. In '51 election, center parties formed numerous broad alliances, won majority in 38 departments (map).

B. In '55 election, center was split between Republican Front and Faure Coalition: "Affiliations" were greatly restricted in scope, and won majorities in only 10 districts.

1. In remaining districts, therefore, proportional representation brought into play, giving Communists additional seats.

II. Increase in Commie strength was in part anticipated, but real surprise was unexpected success of Poujade movement at polls. 4

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DOCUMENT NO.
NO CHANGE IN CLASS. 11
X DECLASSIFIED
CLASS. CHANGED TO: TS, S, C
NEXT REVIEW DATE: 11/1/87
AUTH: 11/1/87
DATE: 11/1/87

- A. Poujadiste candidates got 2.4 million popular vote (for 11% of total): previous French Gov't prediction was perhaps 1.5 million votes.
- B. Captured 52 Assembly seats: maximum pre-election guess was 15.
- C. Yet Poujade movement's electoral campaign was marked by negativism: although movement has spelled out a program, Poujadistes made little effort to present platform to voters.
 - 1. Instead, thumped for convening of "States General" (shades of 1789) to listen to "peoples' grievances."

IV. Background of Poujade movement, itself, reveals little reason for such success at polls: leader is 35-year-old stationer from Saint Cere, in southwest France, who is said to have been Deriot "Fascist" in youth, was later a Gaullist and WW II Resistance member.

- A. Poujade captured imaginations of petty merchants (small, self-employed shop-keepers, artisans, who are marginal economic group but fiercely proud of "bourgeoise" status) with attack on tax laws which, when actually enforced, put special squeeze on this group.
- B. By March '55, Poujade claimed 800,000 followers, a war chest of over \$1 million a year in dues.
- C. At that time, not only delayed Premier Faure's attempts to get special powers for revision of taxes, but actually forced government to capitulate, change laws.
- D. However, in Apr '55 local elections, Poujadistes were soundly beaten at polls.

- V. Poujadiste "surprise" essentially was broad spread between voting strength of movement itself and total popular vote it won (roughly, margin of million votes).
- A. This added strength mostly attributable to floating "protest" vote previously given Gaullist MDC.
 - B. These "protest" voters unwilling to vote Communist, but nonetheless resentful of instability, chaotic qualities of French Gov't.
 - C. Also sympathetic with Poujade's violently-expressed anti-parliamentary attitude (viz: his characterization of Assembly as France's "biggest bordello").
 - D. Bitter over national "shame" of Indochina, North Africa, "protest" voters also attracted by ultra-nationalistic elements of Poujadism.
- VI. Although Communists and Poujadists together control only about same proportion of Assembly seats as Communists and Gaullists did in '51, increased dissension among center groups makes stable French government unlikely.
- A. Intransigence of Mollet and Mendes-France vis-vis the right-center increases possibility of Communist influence.
 - B. Mendes-Mollet insistence on a "Republican Front" government raises possibility of reliance on Communist support, at least for domestic policy.
 - 1. Actual Communist participation in government nonetheless very unlikely.

C. Pro-Atlantic orientation will probably be maintained.

1. Pro-West majority still exists.

VII. As for future of Poujadiste Deputies, they represent many shades of political conviction.

A. Meeting scheduled for 14 Jan to define their program for new Assembly.

B. Unless Poujade can maintain tight "party discipline," chances are that movement will eventually splinter, as did Gaullists.

C. In any case, quite possible that early Assembly sessions will be marred by Poujadiste rowdiness.

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B. In '56, center was split between Republican Front and Faure Coalition; in consequence, "affiliations" were both more numerous and greatly restricted in scope--as result, won majorities in only 10 districts.

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